

Definition Of Key Writing Terms and Principles

Topics Defined

- Thesis
- Topic Sentence
- Specificity and Concreteness
- Echo Words
- Transitions
- Coherence
- Conclusions and Introductions

Thesis

The thesis is the main idea in most college papers. Carefully stated thesis will develop one main idea or will make one main point about your topic. Often the **thesis** statement **will appear at the end of an introductory paragraph(s)**, and the thesis will **obligate** the writer to develop this **one** idea and will **prepare** the reader to expect a presentation of this one idea. Some experienced writers don't have a stated thesis sentence, but the thesis is clearly implied.

Quite often a **key term in the thesis statement can be repeated** as you develop your support paragraphs and ideas. Sometimes a thesis will contain a "table of contents" to announce the content and organization to follow: "Bill Forsyth is a movie director who uses even the smallest of details to engage his viewers—his use of the walls, the watch, and the rabbit are especially effective."

Topic Sentence

The **topic sentence contains the one main idea** that you will develop in a paragraph. Like the thesis statement, the topic sentence is a **promise** or an **announcement** for the content that will be developed in a given paragraph. In many respects, the topic sentence is to the paragraph what the thesis is to the whole paper. Fairly often, a topic sentence will repeat a key term from the thesis and use a transition word or word bridge somewhere in the topic sentence (see definition of transition below).

Specificity and Concreteness

One of the most important writing principles for all writers is specificity or concreteness; concrete words create a sensory response from the reader. A good way to bring specificity to your college writing is to **make specific references to your own experience** and to **specific passages in your textbooks** or other resources. Another way to ensure adequate specificity is to **use lots of proper nouns** (capitalized nouns) and to avoid generalizations in your writing. Instead of saying, "The play was good," say "Ibsen's Doll House dealt with feminist themes seventy years before feminism became an important movement.

Echo Words

Echo words are key words that you repeat from time to time throughout your paper. Many times **echo words** or key terms are found in your **thesis statement** or in **topic sentences**, and it is desirable to repeat these key terms to help your readers stay focused on the one main idea you are developing. If you feel you are repeating the same word too often, use a synonym or a pronoun. For example, if your thesis is on something you have begun to doubt, obviously “doubt” is the key word, but in its place you might use “skeptical” or “uncertain.”

Transitions

Transitions are **word bridges** that help to **connect one sentence to another sentence, one paragraph to another paragraph, or one paragraph to your thesis**. One useful method of transition is to include numbering systems (i.e. **one** idea, the **second** idea, etc.). Other transitions include **one** reason, **another** reason, **still another** reason.

Coherence

Coherence occurs when writers ensure that their sentences, paragraphs, all parts of a paper **stick together**. To make these units of writing cohere, careful writers deliberately use **transitions, repeat key terms, and use synonyms and pronouns that tie back to the thesis statements, topic sentences, and important words**.

Conclusions and Introductions

Introductions are especially important in writing because they **set the stage** for the rest of your paper/essay/report. As such, they present background information that directly leads to a thesis statement. Introductions are important because they **make first impressions**, they **get reader interest**, and they **set the tone** (writer’s attitude toward subject).

Over the years, certain types of introductions have proven to be very useful for college writers. Using **a quotation, a question, an example, statistics, or stating the other side to the issue**—all are proven strategies for opening papers.

Conclusions are also important to successful college writing because they give a sense of closing to your paper. While it is not always necessary to restate your thesis and your supporting ideas, in long papers (more than five pages), repeating your thesis and major supporting ideas is often useful. In shorter papers (two or so pages), often you can conclude a paper by using the word “finally” or “the last” as part of your topic sentence in the last support paragraph and simply end your paper.